

[A fat-tailed Lizard (*E. macularius*) kept in captivity in the Society's rooms attacked and swallowed a young example of the same species which was put into its cage; two common skinks (*Mabuia carinata*) met with a similar fate. So far as it is possible to observe this lizard is an omnivorous feeder. Its diet includes biscuit crumbs, grasshoppers, cockroaches, spiders, scorpions, lizards and mice. An interesting comment on the age attained by these lizards is to be observed in the fact that the present specimen was presented to the Society in August 1915 and is still to-day, after 9 years, as live and vigorous as ever.—Eds.]

No. XX.—PYTHON AND MONITOR.

Some time ago Dr. Moorow-Campbell published an account, with a photograph, of a python which he had shot in the Southern Shan States and which contained a full-grown Gyi (or Barking Deer). The following incident however seems far more extraordinary and may be of interest as it would appear to be unique.

Early this month I was in the Mergui District of Lower Burma with a friend John D. and we were trying to reach the source of a tributary of the Little Tenasserim River in what is almost virgin jungle.

At the end of one day's march our coolies had just deposited their loads and were cutting bamboos to run up the rough shelters we were using at nights, as we were travelling light without tents. Some of the men were across the small stream we were following, when there came a cry of 'Mwe; Mwe; Mwe gyi' (snake, snake, a big snake !)

One naturally thought that they had put up some large snake which had gone off, but they insisted that it was still there, just on the bank of the stream, which here was a pool over waist deep. As it had not been frightened or disturbed apparently by all this noise I thought they had probably lighted upon a Hamadryad, as these are not uncommon in the south of Lower Burma, so put together a gun and went across.

From the junction of a shallow stream I saw on the bank, but almost hidden by undergrowth, the huge girth of what was apparently an immense snake, and, climbing the bank within a few feet of it, found it to be an ordinary python (*Python molurus* ?) lying gorged. From the size and shape of the 'bulge' I took it to be a Gyi, the four shoulder and hip angles being plainly visible and I called back to D. that it was a python with a Gyi* in it, asking him to come and lend a hand in hauling it down into the shallow stream, as not one of the Siamese-Shan coolies with us would touch it, even when it had been shot.

Having got it into shallow water I proceeded to cut open the belly down the ventral shields over the carcass within, with a Dah (the weapon between knife and sword used by all Burmans and Shans, etc., for every purpose). Expecting to come upon the reddish hair of a Gyi I was surprised to come upon a mottled scaly skin; and cutting further exposed a great clawed hand, whereupon I shouted back to D. who, like the coolies 'wasn't having any,' that it wasn't a Gyi but a young Crocodile inside and this I took it to be until I came to the head when I found that it was a monster Monitor Lizard (*Varanus* sp.).

Measurements carefully taken later by both of us with a steel tape gave the length of the Monitor as 5-ft. 9-ins. with a girth of 27-ins., (this after deflation; it was a very great deal more before being punctured, as decomposition had set in and it was greatly bloated, hence the enormous size it first appeared). The python was in perfect lustrous condition, having apparently but very recently shed a skin, and measured 14-ft. 11-ins. in length.

Now two things strike me as curious here. Firstly, that a python should attack a monitor at all, heavily armed as it is with powerful, sharp claws and a com-

* Muntjac or Barking Deer.

paratively formidable set of teeth, and secondly, that having attacked it, it should have been able to envelop its prey so rapidly that the brilliant new suit it was wearing was absolutely without a scratch or mark upon it.

One would have supposed that a fierce battle would have ensued on the first grasping of the lizard by the snake, and that the former would have torn and scatched the snake seriously especially considering the relative size of victor and vanquished, the latter seeming the more powerful by far of the two. But not a mark was visible upon the glossy iridescent new skin of the rock snake.

The body was swallowed head-first, the fore-arms being pressed close to the sides, the hind limbs being bent backwards along the tail. The head was partially digested, but this process had only just commenced, and all the parts of the lizard were intact and perfect, and *not a bone broken!* In all ordinary cases the crushing action of the python, when coiled about its prey and preparing it for swallowing, breaks bones freely, but this tough lizard was intact and after extraction the limbs soon returned to their normal positions, showing that even the articulation of the joints had not been affected.

Although all snakes are more or less ophiophagus under certain conditions the choice of a tough-skinned, horny-backed, and powerfully armed victim like the monitor seems very strange in a locality where more normal foods abound; it was in dense evergreen jungle where fowl, pheasant, the smaller cats, and all kinds of birds are plentiful.

I have no records of size, but although in India I have seen these *Varanida* up to what must have been possibly six feet in length, this one of 5-ft. 9-in. is the largest I have ever seen or heard of in Burma.

Unfortunately the photograph I took of the two, after posing them, is useless for purposes of reproduction, as owing to the density of the forest I gave about a second's exposure and shook the camera slightly with the result that it is difficult to make out which is which.

RANGOON,
April 17th, 1924.

W. R. COLERIDGE BEADON,

[From the environment in which it was taken it is possible that the Monitor referred to is the Water Monitor (*Varanus salvator*) which is found in Bengal, Ceylon, S. China, Burma, the Malay Peninsula and Archipelago. The reptile frequents marshy localities or is found on trees overhanging rivers and streams. It grows to 7 feet in length. Two other species of Monitor occur in Burma, *Varanus flavescens*, the Yellow Monitor and *Varanus nebulosus*, the Clouded Monitor. The Monitor lizards are commonly miscalled Iguanas by Europeans in India. The Iguanas are entirely American, with the exception of two genera found in Madagascar. The Monitors are old world lizards. The term monitor is of curious derivation and is the result of an etymological error. The Arabic term for this lizard is "Ouaran", this has wrongly been interpreted as a warning lizard, hence the latin name Monitor.]

The Python referred to by Mr. Beadon from the lustrous condition of the skin must have recently sloughed. Under these conditions the reptile is usually very hungry. Pythons in captivity are always very active after the process and quite ready for a meal and there is no knowing what a hungry python will not account for. An individual in the Society's rooms swallowed a black partridge, a brother python that had already commenced swallowing the same black partridge and a piece of red blanket which was entangled amongst its coils.—Eds.]